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U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, on Thursday praised the decision by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to back down from its proposed sewage blending policy.

The EPA announced Thursday it will not finalize the sewage blending policy as proposed in November 2003. If finalized, the policy would have allowed publicly owned water treatment facilities to combine filtered, but untreated human sewage, with fully-treated wastewater before discharge.

The policy would have lifted the current prohibition on bypassing a crucial second treatment step allowing more bacteria, pathogens, viruses and parasites into U.S. waterways, environmentalists contended.

Kirk joined with Congressman Bart Stupak, D-Michigan, in March introducing the Save Our Waters From Sewage Act that would have blocked the blending policy.

"I applaud the EPA's decision to back down on their proposal to allow blended sewage water to be dumped in the Great Lakes," said Kirk. "The Stupak-Kirk legislation is picking up bipartisan support in the Congress and will lay out a long-term strategy of never dumping sewage, blended or otherwise, in the Great Lakes."

The Save Our Waters From Sewage Act highlights the need to invest in and upgrade the nation's waste water infrastructure and block the EPA's proposed sewage dumping policy, Kirk said, noting that last spring, the city of Milwaukee dumped billions of gallons of untreated sewer water into Lake Michigan after heavy rains.

Kirk said that "coincidentally," Chicago suffered a record amount of beach closings last summer. It is not yet known whether sewage dumping in Lake Michigan caused the record number of beach closings in Chicago last summer.

After receiving more than 98,000 public comments, the EPA is now in the process of determining other options to address pollutant discharges during wet weather conditions.